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# THE HISTORY OF ARYAN RULE IN INDIA

[ From the Earliest Times to the Death of Akbar ]

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by

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Author of "The Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India",  
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## INTRODUCTION

THE Eastern Question is always with us, for the fate of the British Empire is bound up with it ; and the kernel of the Eastern Question lies in India, the country which has contributed most to the wealth, prosperity, and power of the Empire. But neglect of the study of Indian history, or 'colossal ignorance' of it, has never been regarded as a disqualification for the highest positions in the Government of India. The Imperial Parliament takes it for granted that a capable British Minister is as well qualified for dealing with the problems of Indian administration as he is for any other office of State.

It is a significant fact that Indians generally prefer an administrator who has not been through the mill of the Indian Civil Service, from the idea that he will be likely to treat high political questions in a more liberal and unbiased spirit. And in this matter the Indian has intuitively understood the secret of the astonishing success of British rule in the East. Indian philosophy has always discriminated between two kinds of knowledge—intuitional or divinely inspired wisdom and traditional, or that which is acquired by training and experience ; and the former has always been held to be in the highest plane. It is not the educational equipment or administrative efficiency of the bureaucracy which makes the vast majority of Indians accept British rule as the best possible one, and brings Hindu and Musalman to rally round the flag of the Empire at the most critical time of its existence. It is that they recognise that the present Aryan rulers of India, in spite of 'colossal ignorance' and the mistakes which are the result of it, are generally animated by that same love of justice and fair-play, the same high principles of conduct and respect for

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humanitarian laws, which guided the ancient Aryan statesmen and lawgivers in their relations with the Indian masses.

Our Indo-Aryan brothers have perhaps more than most Britons of that deep veneration for true knowledge which has always been characteristic of the Aryan race. They recognise in modern European scientific research, so far as it is disinterested and not prostituted for base purposes, the culmination of the quest which their own divinely inspired *rishis* followed for thousands of years, and they eagerly desire to have the doors of this new temple of Sarasvati opened to them wider. Lord Macaulay, in spite of his contempt for Indo-Aryan culture, is still regarded by them as a great statesman and benefactor of India—and from their point of view rightly so, for, though profoundly ignorant of Indo-Aryan history, his intuitive genius showed him the path leading to an Indian Renaissance, though he himself totally miscalculated the direction it would take.

But neither Great Britain nor India can always expect to be so well served or afford to regard ignorance of Indian history as the best qualification for Anglo-Indian statesmen. Not only the British nation but all Europe pays dearly for lack of understanding of the Eastern Question. It is not improbable that future historians in reviewing the causes of Europe's present political bankruptcy will find the chiefest in the fatal obsession of British statesmen that for the security of our Empire in India it was necessary or expedient for Great Britain to bolster up Turkish misrule in Asia and in Europe—an idea deeply rooted in Anglo-Indian official traditions—and in the misreading of Muhammadan history, which even now makes Turks, Pathāns, and Mongols the regenerators of idolatrous Hindu India and the cultured inspirers of all that is noble in Indian architecture. Deeper insight into the psychology of Indian history would have added more power and wisdom to the foreign policy of Great Britain and to the cause of the Allies—which is the Aryan cause.

The course of the Great War has shown how groundless were the fears that Indian Muhammadans, as a body, would desire  
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to prolong the unholy alliance between Islam and the powers of evil which Turkish rulers, young and old, in Europe and in Asia, have maintained for so many centuries. India herself has been in the past one of the chief sufferers from this alliance—as Muhammadan historians have clearly shown—and Indian Muhammadans love their motherland too well and respect Islam too much to become the tools of the criminal conspiracy which plunged Europe into a mad war—a conspiracy in which the purblind politicians of Young Turkey believed they saw a great opportunity for themselves and their country.

But neither British nor Turkish politicians can claim much credit for clarity of vision with regard to the Eastern Question. The Aryan spirit of British statesmen saved us from the folly and crime of remaining passive onlookers in the great struggle ; but had their predecessors understood Indian history better the catastrophe might have been minimised or possibly averted. The modern scientific method of Oriental research, inspired by German thoroughness and German lack of psychological insight, has since the days of Macaulay and Mountstuart Elphinstone added greatly to the material for the history of India, but has not done much for the better interpretation of it. In one point, indeed, of vital importance for ourselves, it has even led us further astray. Oriental scholars of the nineteenth century, though they failed completely to understand the predominance of Aryan inspiration in Indian art and to recognise national art as a key to the true interpretation of history, at least firmly grasped the essential truth that before the Muhammadan invasions, if not afterwards, it was Aryan culture which gave India its high place among the civilisations of the world and inspired its greatest intellectual achievements. But many modern writers of Oriental history proclaim as the latest discovery of science that the early Aryan invaders of India, who won the undying veneration of the people as mighty seers and leaders of men, were only successful soldiers, versed in the arts of chivalrous warfare, and that they borrowed their finer culture from the Dravidians, and other civilised races



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they conquered. Almost they would persuade us that the intellectual, high-souled Aryan is a myth, or reduce the historical sum of Aryan achievements to the common factor that might is right and military despotism the best of all possible governments.

Let us by all means construct history on a scientific basis ; but the scientists should not forget that the master-builder must be an artist as well as a mathematician. The historian who totally misunderstands the ideas which inspire the mind of a people may use his material with the utmost scientific skill, but the result will hardly be anything but a complete falsification of the most vital and informing historical truths. And such a total misunderstanding of the Indian mind, as it is expressed in the great monuments of Indian art, runs throughout all the standard histories of India which are the text-books for British statesmen and administrators. Is it not reasonable to suppose that this explains why Indians prefer the ' colossal ignorance ' of the British statesman to the imperfect learning of the experts ? For though Indians themselves may not always be better informed, it must be peculiarly humiliating to them to be constantly told by their rulers that in political science India has never at any period of her history attained to the highest level of Europe ; that Freedom has never spread her wings over their native land ; that they are heirs to untold centuries of ' Oriental despotism ' and must wait patiently until the highly cultured political fruits of the West can be successfully grown in the virgin soil of India.

Whether unintentional or not, no greater spiritual injury can be done to a people than to teach them to undervalue or despise the achievements of their forefathers. To overvalue them can hardly be a mistake. Not the least valuable of our spiritual resources in the Great War has been the desire of every man and woman to uphold the honour of their race, or country, or province, or town, or school, or family, inspired by the traditions, legendary or otherwise, of a glorious past. And it cannot be to the advantage either of the British Empire or of India that British statecraft in India should be based

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upon historically false premises, and that India's present Aryan rulers should misunderstand or ignore the political ideals and methods by which the great men of our own race made the people of India accept Aryan domination as the greatest of divine blessings. The fact that Aryan principles of polity had been to a great extent perverted or forgotten when Great Britain assumed the sovereignty of India does not absolve us from the obligation not only of studying carefully the history of Aryan India, and of preserving with religious care what remains of its monuments, but of following the example of the greatest of Indian Muhammadan rulers, Akbar, in making Indo-Aryan traditions the central pillar of the Empire. In thus honouring our Aryan forerunners in India we shall both honour ourselves and make the most direct and effective appeal to Indian loyalty.

The average Briton understands Indian loyalty as the most decisive proof of the complete success of British rule and the attachment of Indians to the British Crown. The historian who accepts that as a full and sufficient explanation is very far from understanding the Indian mind and has a very limited perception of the truths of Indian history. Indian loyalty is not born of attachment to European political theories or to any modern European form of government. It is a sentiment which is deeply rooted in Indo-Aryan religion and in devotion to the Aryan ideal. The idea of Vishnu the Preserver and King of the Universe has its primitive roots in the ideal Aryan temporal ruler and spiritual leader who protected his people with his strong right arm, upheld the Aryan law of righteousness, and maintained the liberties of the Aryan freeman. *Bhakti*, or whole-souled devotion of man to God, which is one of the leading motives of Indian religious thought, is the consecration of the loyalty of the Aryan soldier towards his chieftain to the ideals of spiritual life. Loyalty is a sentiment which has been nourished by every Indian religious teacher, Brahman as well as Kshatriya. It has been the corner-stone of Indian polity from the remotest antiquity. Krishna preached it in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The heroes of the *Rāmāyana* and

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*Mahābhārata*, whose lives and conduct are still the inspiration of the Indian masses, were the living exemplars of it. The Buddha built up his Sangha upon it. Akbar used it as the foundation of his Dīn-Ilāhī.

Even the Indian who has been sedulously taught in Anglo-Indian schools and British universities to undervalue or despise Indo-Aryan culture has the same subconscious feeling of loyalty to the Aryan ideal, though he finds his inspiration in the pages of English history instead of in the annals of Indian national life. Indian loyalty to the British Empire and the British Crown is therefore in its fullest content a feeling of devoted attachment to those Aryan principles of conduct and Aryan national ideals which Indians as well as Britons have upheld both in peace and in war, in life and in death. Let us therefore beware lest our own disloyalty to those principles and ideals should inspire Indians with suspicion or distrust, and let us not flatter ourselves that the magnificent demonstration of loyalty which the War has called forth from all classes is an expression of complete satisfaction with things as they are and of gratitude for the blessings of British rule. If national art has any significance as an indication of the springs of human action and as an index of human progress, not even the most optimistic Anglo-Indian, looking at the monuments of British rule in India, can maintain that we have yet gone so far even as Akbar went in restoring India to the full height of her former Aryan civilisation. This we have not yet done either on the material or spiritual plane, and India, on the whole, still values spiritual more than worldly gifts, though Europe would persuade her that she is lacking in true insight.

The so-called progressive politician, who treats Indian history as a book no longer read, tells us that we must look forward and not backward; that we can no longer build as Akbar built; that India can gain little or nothing by studying her own past; that East must be West and forget that she was East. Pretending to be a realist with a scientific political programme based upon actualities, he is ignorant of the funda-

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mental economic and social conditions by which a prudent and far-seeing State policy must be governed and blind to the things of everyday Indian life which pass before his own eyes. The logic of history, ancient or modern, Indian or European, is lost upon him.

But to the Briton who can divest himself of insular racial prejudices and of the German habit of thinking, the study of Indo-Aryan political science will have a deep significance, though he may not take a special interest in Indian affairs. For the ancient Aryan rulers of India were confronted by political, economic, and social problems in many ways similar to those with which modern British statesmen and social reformers are struggling, and their solutions of them, according to all the evidence of history, were much more satisfactory to the people at large than any which modern Europe has found. The freedom and general happiness attained by the people of Great Britain with the help of Parliamentary institutions and the richest revenues of the world can hardly be compared with that which Indians within the Aryan pale enjoyed both before and after the fifth century A.D.—the time which we regard as our Dark Ages, and theirs. The Indo-Aryan constitution, built up by the highest intelligence of the people upon the basis of the village communities, and not wrung from unwilling war-lords and landlords by century-long struggles and civil war, secured to the Indian peasant-proprietor not only the ownership of the land, but very considerable powers of self-government. The powers of the central Government, though they might often be abused, were at least delegated to it by the people themselves, and limited by unwritten laws which by common consent were given a religious character. An interesting illustration of the strength of such laws is given by Mr Sidney Webb in the preface to Mr Matthai's valuable book on *Village Government in British India*. Officially the Indo-Aryan political system has long been regarded as dead. But, says Mr Webb, an able Collector of long service in Central India, who was totally unaware of any survival of that system in the villages over which he ruled,

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was led to make inquiries into the matter.<sup>1</sup> He then discovered "in village after village a distinctly effective, if somewhat shadowy, local organization, in one or other form of *panchayat*, which was, in fact, now and then giving decisions on matters of communal concern, adjudicating civil disputes, and even condemning offenders to reparation and fine." This form of local government, though it has no statutory warrant and is not recognised by British tribunals, has gone on silently functioning during centuries of 'Oriental despotism' and under British rule, "merely by common consent and with the very real sanction of public opinion." When Indo-Aryan law and order prevailed in India in the long centuries before the Muhammadan invasions, the economic and political status of the Indian peasant was certainly far higher than that of the English peasant of the twentieth century, if the description of the latter's condition given by Mr Maurice Hewlett may be considered approximately true: "robbed, pauperised, terrorised, mocked with a County Council of landlords, a District Council of tenant-farmers, and a Parish Council without powers."<sup>2</sup>

The British factory-hand and dweller in city slums sings when he goes to war because war is for him a release from servitude and misery often far more degrading than the Indian caste system at its worst. He does not sing in times of peace. He is then chained down to a daily life in which there is no joy or freedom—the slavery of modern industrialism. He struggles vainly to free himself from it by the organisation of trade unions, and only adds to the political machine another form of tyranny which often is a menace to the whole imperial fabric. The co-operative trade and craft guilds of India

<sup>1</sup> A still more striking case illustrating the survival of Indo-Aryan institutions, silently functioning unknown to the British authorities, is that of the Indian master-builder, whose labours contributed so much to the making of Indian history. His existence and work in the present day were both unknown and unrecognised officially until the Government of India was led to make the specific inquiries which resulted in the remarkable revelations published in the Archaeological Survey's Report on Modern Indian Building, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the *Daily News*, November 11, 1916.



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helped the workman to enjoy life, gave him self-respect and fostered his technical skill, and at the same time served religiously the interests of the State. The student of Indian history may also be led to consider whether the Imperial Parliament of Great Britain, constituted as it now is on more or less empirical lines, is really more efficient as political machinery than was the philosophic scheme of Indo-Aryan polity, in which the common law of the land, formulated by the chosen representatives of the people, had a religious as well as a legal sanction, and represented the highest power of the State to which even the king and his ministers must bow. It will be a surprise to many readers to discover that the Mother of the Western Parliaments had an Aryan relative in India, showing a strong family likeness, before the sixth century B.C., and that her descendants were a great power in the State at the time of the Norman Conquest.

Perhaps the most conspicuous fault of historians of India has been the inveterate habit of regarding Buddhism, Brahmanism or Hinduism, and Muhammadanism as three entirely independent camps, standing widely apart and representing irreconcilable religious ideas. In dealing with the history of Aryan rule in India it is neither necessary nor desirable to enter deeply into questions of sectarian dogma or philosophical disputes; but it is of vital importance to show as accurately as possible the relationship between different schools of religious thought and their influence upon political ideas, for there can be no true history of India which separates politics from religion. Into this very wide field of historical research I have endeavoured to bring forward the evidence of Indian art to correct the errors of previous writers, whose misinterpretation of it has often led their readers hopelessly astray. Even more important is it to understand the psychological standpoint upon which Indo-Aryan political science is pivoted. The great thinkers and social reformers of India, beginning with the Buddha, grasped firmly one of the eternal verities, generally ignored in Western politics, that ideas, good or evil, are more potent than armaments— or the spirit survives when

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the body is destroyed. It is therefore no less important for the State to purge the body politic of evil thinking than it is to stay an epidemic or provide efficient means of national self-defence. For that reason the philosophical debating halls, in which king and commoner met on terms of equality, always played a more important part in Indo-Aryan politics than councils of war, Acts of Parliament, or royal edicts; and for the same reason the political education of the Indian masses in the Dark Ages of European history was probably far better than that which obtains in most European countries in the twentieth century.

The breakdown of Indo-Aryan constitutional government under the stress of foreign aggression was more due to the weakness of human nature than to the defects of the system itself—just as the virtue of the British Parliament lies in the character and ability of its members rather than in its peculiar constitution. Similar causes produce similar effects both in India and in Europe. Indo-Aryan polity, instructed by the Buddha and other great Aryan teachers of the military caste, was firmly based upon the principle that right is might, or, as the *Mahābhārata* puts it, that “the heavens are centred in the ethics of the State.” But it reckoned without the Huns and the sword of Islam as wielded by Turkish war-lords of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Mahmūd of Ghazni and ‘Alā-ud-dīn. Indo-Aryan statesmen did not find that the illiteracy of the Indian masses prevented them from taking a considerable part in the management of their own affairs, for before the days of the printing press and modern journalism there were in India other means of instructing the people and a highly organised educational system which, judging by results, was far more efficient than the present one. Until British statesmen divest themselves of the fatal habit of judging Indian things by Western standards they will never see them in the right perspective. Indo-Aryan statesmen were not afraid of allowing the masses, including women, to vote, on account of their illiteracy—for the most learned and most representative Indians were often illiterate in the European

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sense: Akbar, one of the most brilliant, successful, and learned statesmen of the sixteenth century, was one of them. British rule has not yet profoundly affected conditions which have their root in times long before the beginnings of English history.

It is not for the historian to offer a solution of modern political questions, but to provide material for the study of them. Having served an apprenticeship as a writer of Indian history in the study and exegesis of Indian artistic records, I now venture to use them to explain and amplify the mass of literary, epigraphical, and other archaeological material which many writers, European as well as Indian, have collected and made the basis of their historical studies. For chronological data and statements of bare fact I can lay no claim to original research, and must express full acknowledgment for the use of the work of my predecessors in those directions. But the treatment of the subject and interpretation of facts are for the most part my own, and they often differ materially from those of other writers, a difference which must be ascribed to my different interpretation of the artistic record. As my interpretation of Indian art has won the general assent of my fellow-artists in Europe I cherish the hope that in the present work I may succeed in throwing new light upon the subject of Aryan rule in India. I have avoided as far as possible entering into controversies on points of purely archaeological interest, though it has been sometimes necessary to take a definite standpoint when important historical issues are at stake. The question of the age of the three most important works on Indo-Aryan polity, the *Kautilīya-artha-Sāstra*, the Code of Manu, and that of Sukrāchārya, is one of them. It is generally agreed by Oriental scholars that the first relates to the time of Chandragupta Maurya and the second to the early centuries of the Christian era, when Buddhist ethics had deeply influenced the traditions of Brahmanism. The age of the *Sukrā-nītisāra* is a much-debated question. Many Indians ascribe to it a very great antiquity; some European scholars take it to be a comparatively modern one, *i.e.* of the twelfth or fourteenth

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century A.D. Both may be right from their respective stand-points, for all three of these codes undoubtedly contain a body of traditional Aryan law and custom of very remote antiquity, which can often be recognised in the traditions of modern Indian life. On the other hand, Sukrāchārya contains references to the use of explosives and military weapons which can hardly be referred to the Mauryan epoch or earlier. I have therefore taken the *Sukrā-nītisāra* as generally descriptive of Indo-Aryan society in the early Middle Ages, but have not hesitated to quote it as an authority on Indo-Aryan constitutional law and custom in previous times, when it seems only to explain or amplify parallel sections in Kautiliya's and Manu's codes. Similarly I have sometimes assumed Manu's laws to have been recognised in very early Aryan times, though the compilation itself belongs to a later period. When the philological evidence is obscure the historian is bound to rely on *sruti* rather than *smṛiti*. For the history of the Muhammadan conquest I have mostly used the material so abundantly provided by Muhammadan historians, only checking their accounts with the artistic evidence so as to remove the sectarian gloss which has falsified the interpretation of historical facts in exactly the same way as official German reports falsify the facts of modern history. The great development of Islamic culture in India is thus shown in its true aspect as a distinct branch of the Indo-Aryan tree, and not, as Fergusson and his followers have made it, a manifestation of inborn 'Turanian' spirituality distinguishing Muhammadan 'culture' from Hindu 'barbarism.'

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From Fergusson's *History of Eastern and Indian Architecture*,  
by kind permission of Mr John Murray.

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From Fergusson's *History of Eastern and Indian Architecture*  
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## I. EASTERN GATEWAY OF THE BHARHUT STŪPA

### *Frontispiece*

Belongs to about the third century B.C., and is one of the numerous monuments erected by Asoka, either to contain relics of the Buddha or to mark the sacred places hallowed by his memory. The illustration shows one of the four entrances to the pilgrims' procession path, which were placed at the cardinal points, and part of the stone rail enclosing it. The clustered pillar, surmounted by a lion, represents an imperial standard, and is an example of the fine craftsmanship of the Indo-Aryan masons under whose direction Asoka's monuments were planned and executed. They were State servants under the special protection of the Crown. The fact that foreign craftsmen who showed exceptional skill were sometimes admitted into their ranks accounts for the frequent traces of Hellenic craftsmanship found in royal Indian monuments, but the inspiration of the art is always essentially Indian. See Chapter VII.  
*Photo India Office.*

## 2. INDO-ARYAN VILLAGE PLANS

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- A. *Dandāka*, named after a Brahman's *danda*, or staff, and intended for an *asvāma*, or hermitage.
- B. *Nandāvāria*, or 'Abode of Bliss,' intended for a mixed population including all the four *varnas*.  
(Corrected from Rām Rāz, essay on the Architecture of the Hindus.)

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From a colossal statue at Anurādhapura, Ceylon, attributed by Dr Coomaraswamy to the second century A.D., but probably a century or two later. It represents the Buddha as he began to emerge from the state of profound meditation.

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The stūpa, like that at Bharhut, is one of Asoka's monuments, but the elaborately carved gateways, reproducing ancient Indian town or village gateways, were added by different royal donors at later periods. See p. 110.



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